Remarks of Benjamin H. Grumbles
2007 National Awards for Smart Growth Achievement Ceremony
November 14, 2007

Introduction

- Thank you, Scott [Kratz] (Vice President for Education of the Nation Building Museum), and thanks to all of you for joining us today to celebrate the winners of EPA's 2007 National Award for Smart Growth Achievement. I would also like to thank the review committee members who helped select the award winners. I know many are here in the audience today and want you to know how much EPA appreciates the time and effort each of you put into the review process.

- The National Building Museum is a great venue for an event honoring excellent community development, because it celebrates our nation's architectural and community planning heritage.

- Today, states, cities, and towns are continuing that great heritage by planning for growth that will house our growing population and foster economic opportunity, while also protecting the environment and creating vibrant, diverse communities. This year's smart growth award competition drew applicants from across the nation, and the winners are truly exceptional.

- And let me add that one of the great things about these winners – as is true almost every year – is that all of them incorporate a broad range of smart growth policies and goals. That comprehensive approach is what we are looking for in our award winners.

- We are highlighting these innovative approaches to growth and development so that other places can use these award winners as models to meet the environmental and economic challenges of the 21st century.

- As a nation, we face the overarching challenges of continuing to provide safe, affordable homes for our growing population, making it easy for people to get around, and creating good jobs and new opportunities for Americans. And we have to do these things in a way that ensures we continue to have

safe drinking water, clean air, and an environment that is healthy and enjoyable for humans and the rest of the natural world.

- This year's award winners join our previous 24 honorees in helping to show the way.

Water

- When I think about the many issues EPA faces, I am struck by how many of them are related in some way to growth. Air quality, water quality and water supply, brownfield redevelopment, wetlands and wildlife habitat protection, water infrastructure -- all are linked in some way to how and where we grow. In fact, the long-term sustainability of our environment and the systems that support our civilization are directly affected by how we develop our cities and towns.

- My role at EPA is to oversee our many water-related programs, so I want to focus for a few minutes on the relationship between development and water issues. Growth and development have important linkages to many of our water resources. These linkages explain why EPA's Office of Water is pleased to work in close partnership with the Smart Growth Program on many projects all of which emphasize that it's important to Grow with the Flow.

- Depending on where it occurs and how it is designed, development can either result in more runoff and increased pollution to our rivers, lakes, and estuaries, or it can be protective of these resources.

- Depending on where it occurs and how it is designed, development can either destroy sources of clean drinking water or preserve them.

- Depending on where it occurs and how it is designed, development can either create the need for expensive new water infrastructure or it can use existing capacity and generate reinvestment in aging infrastructure.

- Smart growth techniques-- using land more efficiently, reinvesting in existing communities, cutting edge site design--- can both save money and make it easier to develop in a way that achieves and maintains healthy water quality. Smart growth and clean water go hand in hand.

- Did you know that for every acre of brownfield that we redevelop, nearly 5 acres of greenfields are preserved? And preserving natural areas is important for water. A natural meadow absorbs sixteen times the amount of stormwater that would run off of a parking lot of the same size.

- Taking advantage of these opportunities is crucial. Run-off from developed areas is a leading source of impaired water quality in our streams, lakes and estuaries. And, for EPA, these sources are especially hard to get a handle on. Yet, they are a growing share of the pollution we must address.

- Well, a lot of efforts are geared towards reducing the impact of stormwater run-off from new development -- conservation design, low impact development and other techniques that you're all familiar with—and reducing impact is good. It's a major part of the "Green Infrastructure" movement Administrator Johnson is championing

- But, the award winners this year offer a more optimistic proposition than simply reducing impact. They offer the promise of using development to improve protection of water quality and water resources.

- Think of that. Using economic growth, using development, to grow our way out of an environmental problem. That's actually what we do when we redevelop and retrofit our existing communities.

- Our winner for Overall Excellence, the New Columbia redevelopment in Portland, Oregon, and our winner in the Built Projects category "High Point" in Seattle both show what can be done to make development a restorative force for water resources.

- Both projects took old public housing projects with poor run-off controls, increased their development intensity, created mixed use and mixed income neighborhoods, and improved their stormwater performance.

- New Columbia uses 80 percent less underground piping to handle its stormwater runoff than comparable developments use. Instead, the neighborhood uses a "green street" system that filters stormwater naturally and at the same time lines the streets with plants, making it more pleasant and inviting for walking and biking.

- After redeveloping the 82-acre distressed public housing site, they now manage approximately 98% of their stormwater on-site.

- Creating great new places for people to live AND reducing stormwater runoff! That is an achievement we need to see more often.

- Each year, the Smart Growth awards feature a rotating category to highlight an area of special focus. This year, our rotating category is Waterfront and Coastal Communities.

- More than half of the U.S. population lives within 50 miles of a coast. Within 10 years, the coastal population is expected to grow by 12 million people—or by 3,600 people per day.

- Development near a body of water offers different opportunities – and different challenges – from development inland. The very things that draw people to live in these areas – the clean water, wildlife, beaches, riverbanks, and marshes – are also at risk from poorly executed development.

- It is a delicate but important balance: to enjoy the natural beauty and recreational amenities of a waterfront area, while protecting it so that future generations can enjoy it as well.

- The winner in the Waterfront and Coastal Communities category, the town of Barnstable, Massachusetts, is emblematic of this struggle and we are recognizing them for the great progress they have made.

- Like many communities in places of natural beauty and recreational amenities – in this case, Cape Cod – the town has experienced rapid growth. That growth encroached on critical natural areas, and overwhelmed sewer infrastructure. It threatened the very assets that drew people to the area to begin with.

- In response, town leaders worked with the community to preserve natural lands, steer growth to the downtown, redevelop brownfields, and make necessary improvements to wastewater infrastructure. Now the downtown is revitalized, and the whole area has improved access to the waterfront. Great things happened when progressive cities embrace rather than turn their face from the river.

- I think this is a great example because it shows not only how to accommodate new growth in a way that's more protective for the environment, but it also offers a positive model for addressing our water infrastructure crisis.

- Most people know about the need to repair our nation's roads, bridges, and electricity grid, but the infrastructure that EPA deals with – the systems that provide our drinking water and treat our wastewater – are also in urgent need of attention.

- In Barnstable they had a limited amount of money and a choice to make. They could either pay for new infrastructure to accommodate growth at the edge of town and leave the existing businesses and citizens with inadequate infrastructure.

- Or, they could make upgrades that serve existing taxpayers AND serve new growth at the same time. Leveraging the new development to solve existing problems—now that's smart growth.

- If we're going to successfully meet our infrastructure needs in this country it's going to take a combination of public and private funds and that means finding these kinds of win-win solutions and using our public resources to make these kinds of private investments attractive and yes profitable.

- You'll find this is a theme with this year's winners.

- For instance, the winner in the Policies and Regulations category also targets its investments to reuse existing infrastructure. The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board builds affordable homes, preserves historic buildings, and protects farmland and open space from development. By directing its development investments to village centers, the board helps reduce the need for new infrastructure to be built in outlying areas.

Climate Change

- I've talked a lot about the connection between better development and better outcomes for water. I want to focus for a moment on another crosscutting environmental challenge we face -- global climate change.

- Obviously, there's a lot of talk right now about climate and different solutions. EPA has many programs to help the United States address this challenge – Energy Star and WaterSense; the Change a Light, Change the World campaign; the Climate Leaders program; and many others.

- One program that doesn't often get mentioned in connection with climate change is the smart growth program.

- But, I want to make the connection because every project that I've talked about is not only good for water but is also good from a climate perspective.

- These smart growth projects are communities where people can choose to walk or bike to their destinations. These compact communities can also support public transit. And if you do choose to drive, you don't have to drive as far. Driving less means fewer carbon dioxide emissions.

- A new report, *Growing Cooler: The Evidence on Urban Development and Climate Change*, has just been released by the Urban Land Institute.

- In this report, a team of leading urban planning researchers estimates that compact development could reduce the amount we drive enough to lower carbon dioxide emissions by 7 to 10 percent by the year 2030.

- The great thing about these reductions is that they are a natural outgrowth of market demand – people want to live in these attractive, convenient, and sustainable neighborhoods, and right now there just aren't enough homes in these places to meet demand.

- And finally, unlike a lot of the other measures being talked about, these compact communities will actually save money – in infrastructure costs, in transportation costs, and in personal expenditures – while reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

- All of these elements combine to make great projects like the High Point Redevelopment in Seattle, where climate, water protection and market demand come together around smart growth with green building. The project uses compact development, walkable streets, and Energy Star-qualified homes to save $17 million a year in reduced energy demand, less need for waste water treatment, and less road maintenance.

- Growth that delivers on multiple fronts—a hallmark of our winners and of smart growth in general. Another important aspect of smart growth is making sure that people of lower income or disadvantaged background share in the prosperity that growth can bring.

Equity

- We introduced the Equitable Development category as a rotating category in last year's award competition. It's such an important issue – and unfortunately often overlooked in development projects – that we decided to keep the category this year, too, so that we could gather more examples of places that are developing in ways that help their poorest and least advantaged residents.

- It's inspiring to see what happens when a community comes together to create new opportunities. Local residents get involved in creating their new neighborhood. Maybe they get the chance to open a business like they've always dreamed of. Or their kids can play in a new park. Or they can finally own their own home.

- The award winner in the Equitable Development category, the Abyssinian Neighborhood Project in Harlem, must have dozens, if not hundreds, of stories like these. This project cleaned up and redeveloped vacant properties, built homes that are affordable for the neighborhood residents, developed space for locally owned businesses, and created new opportunities for kids in the neighborhood to learn and to have fun.

Conclusion

- With communities like these leading the way and showing us how it's done, I feel confident that together, neighborhood by neighborhood, we can create the sustainable, healthy, and prosperous future that we all want.

- The smart growth program and its supporters, like the Office of Water, are committed to partnering with our winners and other innovative communities across the country.

- In closing, I wanted to touch on one very important approach EPA is taking to try to be a better partner.

- We have seen examples of developments that not only reduce their impact on water resources but actually improve upon existing conditions. Sometimes, because of their innovative nature, these projects can be difficult to navigate through federal, state, or local regulatory structures.

- Well, at EPA, we are looking at ways to turn this around—to ensure that our regulations recognize and are responsive to projects with superior performance in protecting and restoring water resources.

- I look forward to our continued work with innovators like our winners to advance this goal.

- Now, please join me in honoring and applauding the 2007 winners.

- And now to present the awards, here is Geoff Anderson, Director of the Smart Growth Program at EPA.